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ABSTRACT

Designed to provide Nevada's school population with information that will facilitate awareness and understanding of past and present Native Nevadan lifestyles and contributions, this generalized curriculum guide might constitute a social studies unit for upper elementary and/or junior high schools. Emphasis is on the cultural-historical influence of Nevada land and climate and plant, animal, and bird life. The narrative is supplemented by pictures (sketches of plants, food preparation, and food harvest); a word study list (40 words); a physiographic map of the United States; and a Nevada map, delineating county boundaries and the historical territories of the Washoe, Northern and Southern Paiute, and Shoshonean Indian tribes. Basic concepts include geographical influence on lifestyle; semi-nomadic and semi-sedentary cultures; food gathering and food preparation; medicinal use of plants; staple foods; the necessary ethic of "waste not"; and the implements and means of animal food procurement. The word study list includes such terms as metate, staple, mahogany, spawn, migratory, pits, atlatl, terrain, nomadic, prehistoric, pinon, and intense. (JC)

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INDIANS OF NEVADA

by

HELEN DUNN

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FOREWORD

The Nevada State Department of Education is pleased to be able to publish this series as part of a continuing program of information on Nevada Indians.

This program is designed to provide Nevada's school population with information in order that they may have a greater awareness and understanding of the lifestyle, past and present, as well as the contributions made by the Native-Nevadans.

No attempt has been made to edit or alter the author's original manuscripts.

Chas. H. Poehlman, Consultant
(Indian Education)

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ABOUT

HELEN DUNN

A native of Leadville, Colorado, she came to Goldfield, Nevada, when a baby. There she went through the school system, and graduated from Esmeralda County High School with high honors.

She is a graduate of the University of Nevada, specializing in history and received a B.A. An M.A. degree in Journalism was received from the University of Colorado.

She taught in Goldfield High School and in Reno's Billinghurst Junior High School.

Helen Dunn has long been identified with the study of Nevada. She fostered such a study at Billinghurst where a section of the school's library is known as the Helen M. Dunn Nevada History Library.

She has written several Nevada booklets which will be published by the Nevada State Department of Education.

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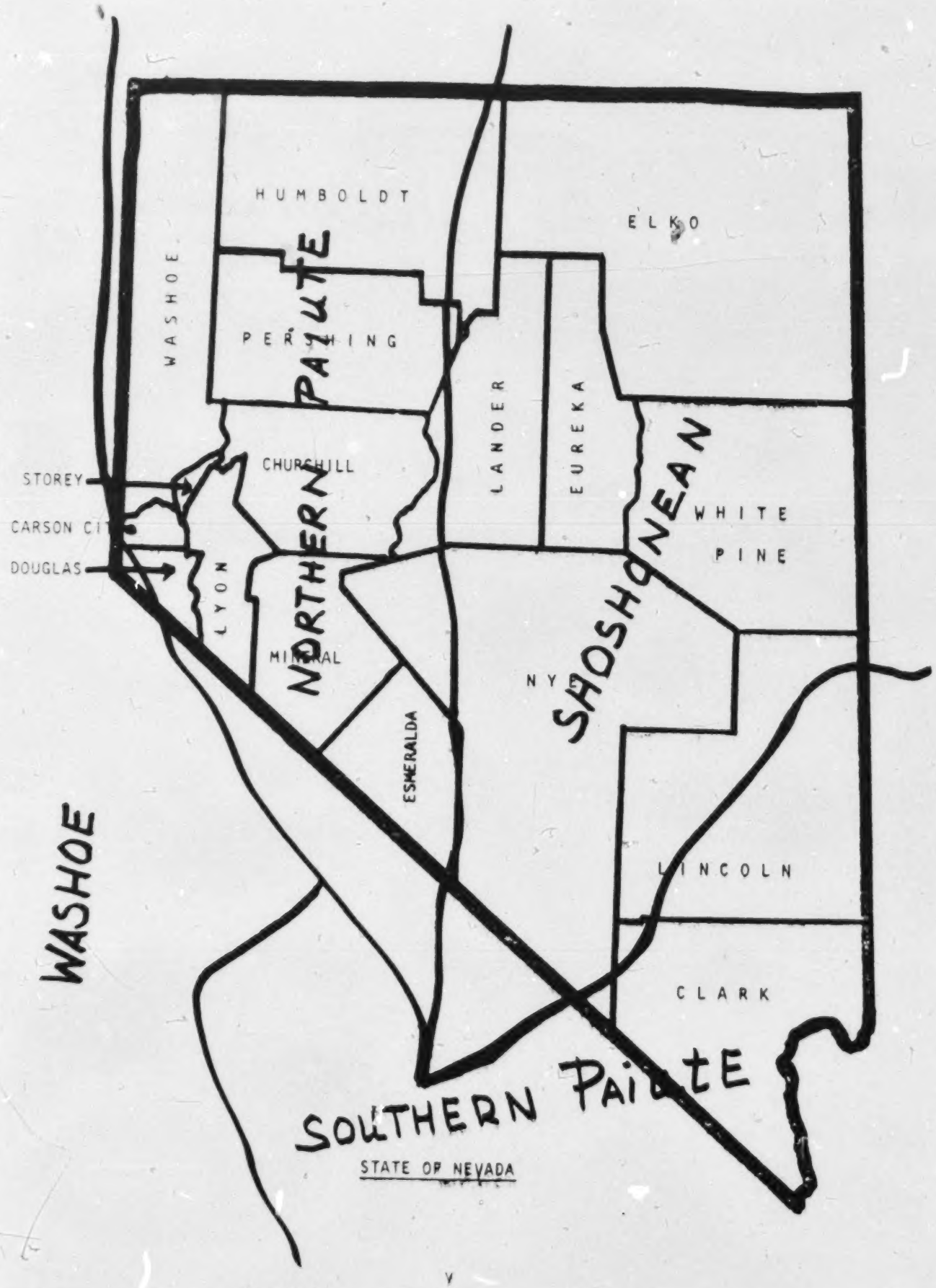
HUMBOLDT
ELKO
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PERSHING
LANDER
EUREKA
WHITE PINE
STOREY
CHURCHILL
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DOUGLAS
LYON
MINERAL
NYE
ESMERALDA
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WASHOE
NORTHERN PAIUTE
SHOSHONEAN
SOUTHERN Paiute
STATE OF NEVADA

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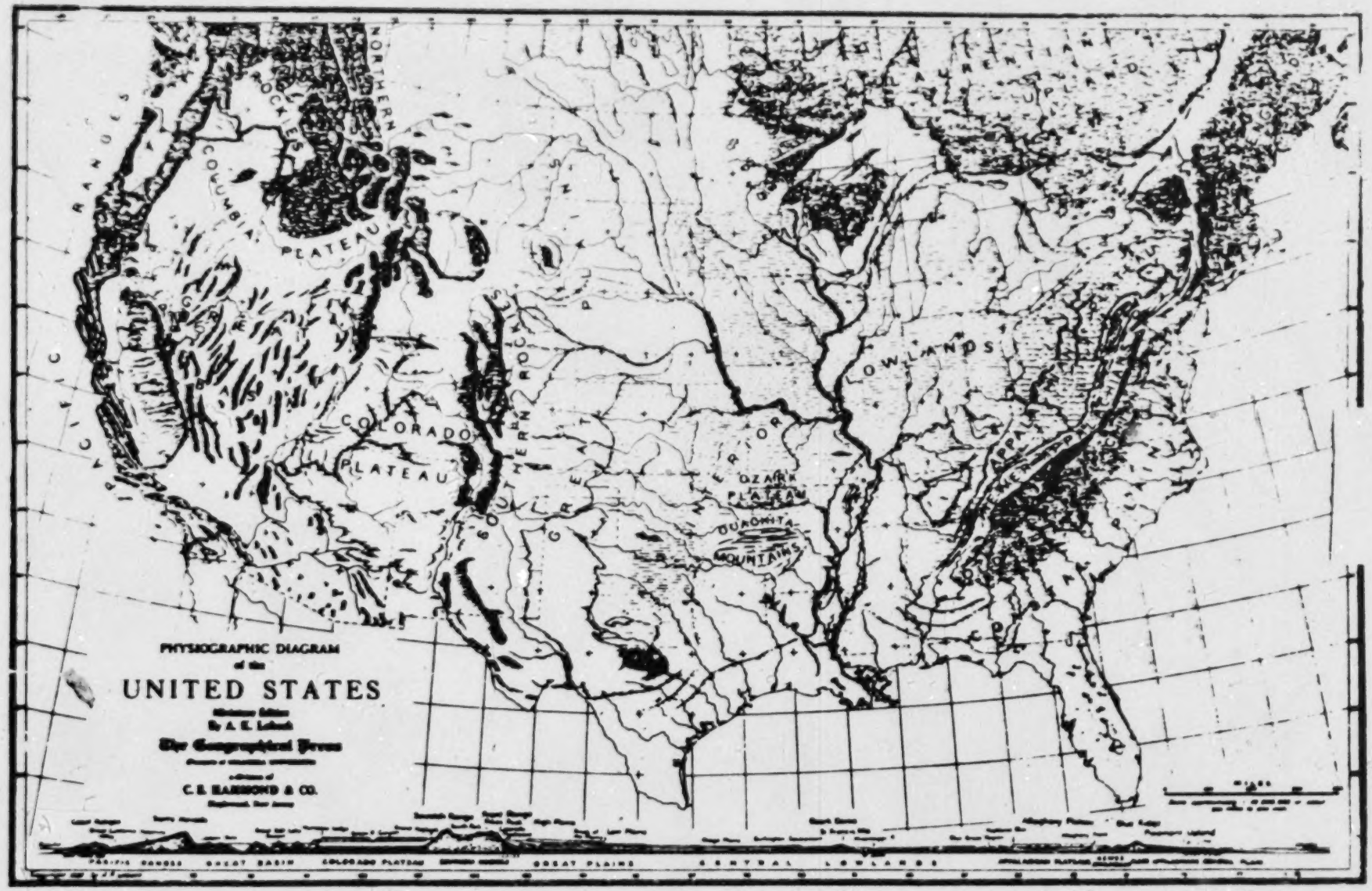

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VOLUME 2

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LAND AND CLIMATE

To know and understand the story of the Nevada Indian we must realize how he was influenced by the land and the climate in which he lived.

The land is one of varied and rugged topography with high mountain ranges, low and narrow valleys, deserts and wastelands. It is a land ranging in elevation from less than 1,000 to more than 10,000 feet. It is a land of plateau appearance, within the confines of the Great Basin. It is a land where most of the rivers and streams disappear into sinks or lakes.

With this varied land appearance, the climate and rainfall is likewise varied. The climatic conditions include bright sunshine, small annual precipitation on the valleys and deserts, heavy snowfall in the high mountains, dryness and purity of air, and large ranges of temperature. In some parts of the area the summers are short and hot and winters are long and cold. In others the winters are only moderately cold. Yet, in other sections the summers are long and very hot and the winters are short and mild.

With some knowledge of the climatic conditions and the appearance of the terrain, it is easier for us to see the need of the Indian to be on the move. Yes, he had to be on the move for shelter from nature's intense cold and heat; he had to be on the move to seek food and material for his home and clothing.

Let us consider some facts about the foods of the Nevada Indian.

PLANT LIFE

The Nevada Indian was a semi-nomadic or semi-sedentary culture. He traveled with the climatic conditions to seek his food. His journey took him to regions where he found and gathered wild seeds, pinon nuts, and acorns. These he ground on a slab of stone (often made of basalt) called a metate. The grinders were flat and round stones known as manos. A winnowing tray was used to separate the seeds from the husks.

The Indian had many uses for the ground meal. It was used for thickening soup, for seasoning, for tea, and for medicine.

Some of the wild plants the Indian found on his migration and used for his food were, among others, the sunflower, sand grass or Indian rice, blazing star, screw bean, hone mesquite, and wild mustard.

The pinenut, a staple food, was gathered from the pinon pine. The Indian took the cones and roasted them either on a sagebrush fire or on a hot rack oven. The nuts taken from the cones were eaten from the shell, ground into meal, or stored for future use. The meal was used in a thick soup and used for baby food (in lieu of milk). Even today, old Indians eat this soup with their fingers. The storing of pinenuts and pinenut meal was done in buckskin bags, in containers made of animal intestines, or in large burden baskets. The Indian women who had woven the burden baskets from native willows and twigs carried them on their backs. Pinenuts still in their cones were also stored in deep pits dug near the trees. Still another use made by the Indian of the pinenut was for barter or trading with other bands traveling from nearby areas.

The Indian band often took the name of the food they ate. An example of this was the Northern Paiutes of the Honey Lake region. Because much of their food supply came from the wada seeds, they were called the Wadakut or Wada Eaters.

Other than plant life that was eaten or ground into meal, the Indian sought wild fruit. This he ate raw, dried, or mixed with other food. Among the many varieties he found as he roamed the hills, deserts, and valleys were currants, raspberries, chokeberries, and rose berries, just to mention a few.

Roots, too, served the Indians with foods and medicines. A stick of mahogany (a very tough wood) with a handle of antler was used to dig

into the earth. Once again the source of food supply created the name of a band called the Diggers. After the roots were obtained, they were eaten raw, boiled, or roasted. They were also dried and ground into a meal used for a thick soup. Some of the plants whose roots were staple food for the Indian were bitter-root, camas, wild garlic, nut grass, sego lily, with caraway, wild carrot, and trail potato.

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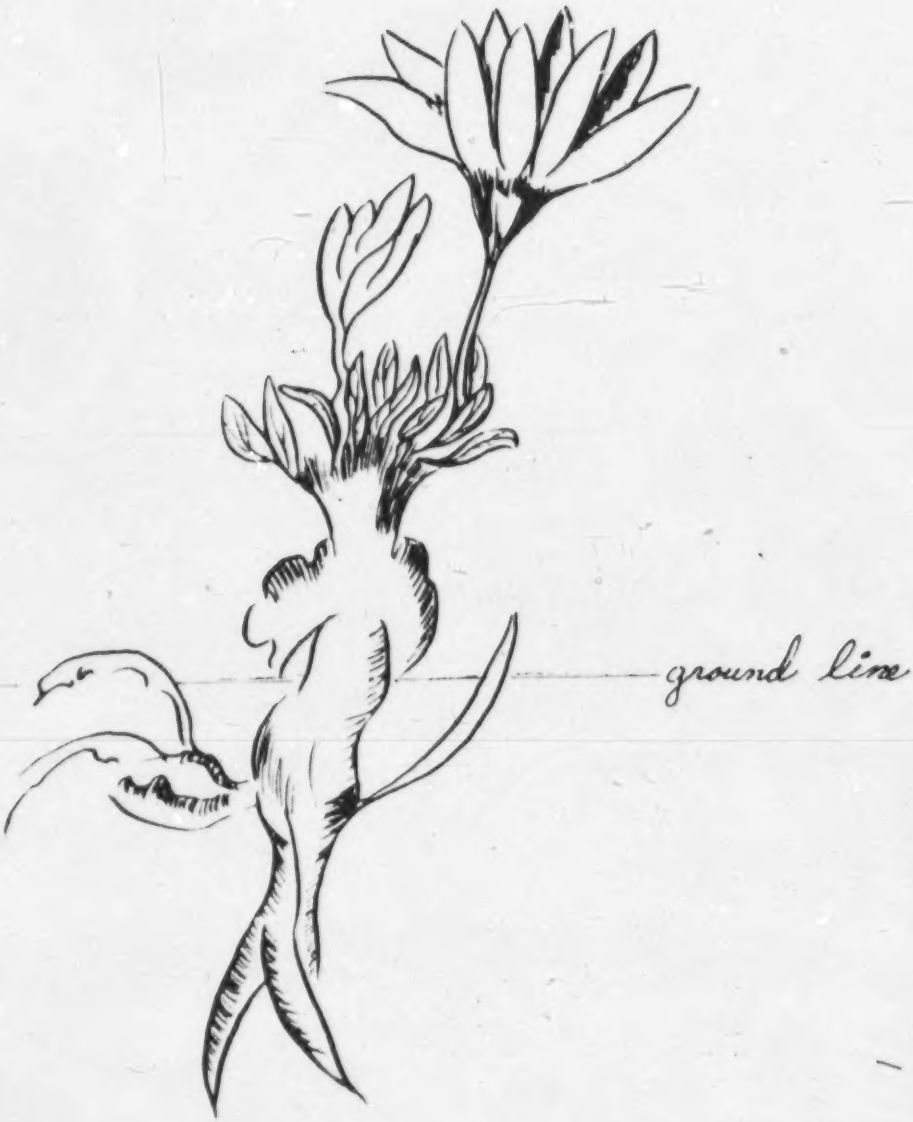

Bitter Root
Lewisia Rediviva

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Blue Camas
Camassia esculenta

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Chokecherry
Prunus melanocarpa

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Pine Nut
Pinus Monophylla

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ANIMAL LIFE

It is often said that the Indian of what is now Nevada had to depend for his food upon anything that crawled, swam, and flew through the air. These, too, gave him a source for clothing and shelter material. Mentioned are moles, shrews, weasels, skunks, badgers, coyotes, bobcats, black and grizzly bears, ground squirrels, chipmunks, gophers, mice, kangaroo rats, wood rats, voles, muskrats, porcupines, cottontails, pigmy rabbits, jack rabbits, deer, prong-horn antelope, mountain sheep, elk, turtles, and rock chuck. Mentioned, too, were the mountain lion and the desert ram. Ants, grasshoppers, and fly larvae were eaten. Fish and other life of the lakes, rivers, and streams were prized items of the food list. It is thought that, in very early times, the buffalo was a source of life to the Indian of this region.

The Indian had many ways of killing animals. Large ones were often driven over cliffs, then stoned or clubbed to death. Some were hunted and killed with the atlatl or throwing spear or with the bow and arrow. Antelope were charmed into rope corrals by the shaman, a man of special powers. The curious animal was attracted by feathers tied to a rope and moving in the wind and walked into the trap.

Snares of woven bark were used on small animals. Nets were stretched and rabbits were driven into them. They were then killed with clubs or their necks were wrung. These rabbit drives were a communal gathering. Several bands of Indians often joined their nets together, with the women and children taking part in the activity.

No part of an animal was wasted by the Indian. A deer, for instance, was killed near water. Then its stomach was removed and washed out and was used as a container for cut-up pieces of heart, liver, kidney and lungs, and for blood. This mixture was allowed to cool, then was eaten like head cheese or roasted in the coals.

The meat of the deer was preserved in many ways. The brain was dried and used for food. It was also used for a tanning mixture to treat hides. The bones of deer, antelope, and other animals were used to make tools, charms and ornaments. The hooves were dried and made into tinklers or pendants. The intestines were eaten, but they were also used for containers.

Fish were not only a delicacy to the Indians, but also a source of staple food. The cutthroat trout, which sometimes weighed twenty-five pounds, was found in lakes and streams, especially the Truckee

River. There they swam up the river to spawn in such large numbers that the water seemed black, according to stories told by the old Indian men. These fish were caught by hand, spears, nets, and bone fishhooks.

The Indians, that is, the Northern Paiutes living in the Pyramid Lake region, were called "Kuyuithuht" because of the strange fish inhabiting the lake. This fish, a sucker type, came close to the shore each spring to spawn. A set line was used to catch them. This was sometimes a hundred feet long with several hundred hooks attached. The flank of the fish, which contained rich oils, was eaten raw or dried, smoked or roasted. Other fish caught included catfish and chub.

(A note of interest is that at Falcon Hill, a cave on the shore of now-dry Winnemucca Lake, an ancient fisherman's cache was found. It showed that thousands of years ago, prehistoric Indians of the region did fish. The find showed that these early Nevada "residents" used spear points, nets, awls, and bone knives!)

BIRD LIFE

Bird life was another source of food for the Indians of Nevada. Many of these were waterfowl found in the marsh lands. The birds were attracted to decoys and caught in nets. Birds were also stalked and shot with arrows.

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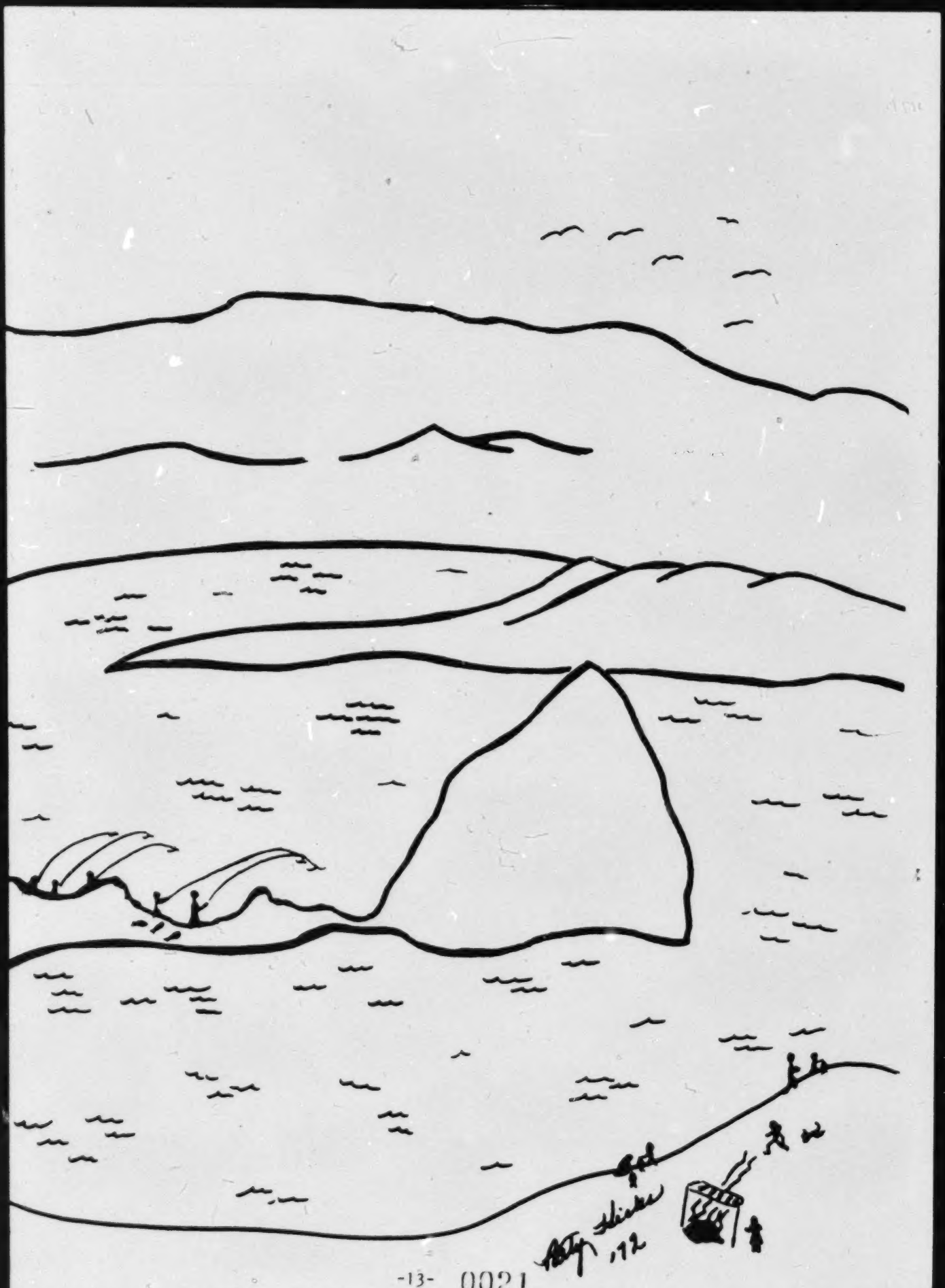

SUMMARY

The Indians of what is now Nevada, who were also called Indians of the Desert Culture, selected food from every source at hand--plant life, roots, animals, fish, and birds. They took from the land but failed to cultivate it very much or put anything back into it. Therefore, food was often scarce. Grouping in small bands, the Indians traveled in order to get the necessities of life. They knew one thing was certain--search and work, or starve.

WORD LIST

1. primitive
2. culture
3. nomadic
4. metate
5. manos
6. basalt
7. winnowing
8. migratory
9. native
10. shelter

1. staple
2. pinon
3. cones
4. sagebrush
5. baskets
6. willow
7. lieu
8. storage
9. meal
10. pits

1. mahogany
2. antler
3. larvae
4. ancient
5. shaman
6. snares
7. communal
8. atlatl
9. preserve
10. tinklers

1. delicacy
2. spawn
3. cache
4. prehistoric
5. decoys
6. stalked
7. terrain
8. varied
9. nomadic
10. intense